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Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Selfie Usage in Marketing
Between Companies and Consumers

by

Qinjin Yang

A Thesis presented

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

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Table of Contents

Abstract	6
Introduction	7
Literature Review	11
Photography Versus Selfie	11
Semiotics, Gaze, and Narcissism	14
Taste, Social Capital, and Megaphone Effect	16
The Uses and Gratification Theory	19
Self-marketing and Product Marketing With Selfies	20
Research Questions:.....	22
Method	22
Coca-Cola Advertising Campaign - #SelfieSweeps, Share a Coke.	23
Apple Inc. Advertising Campaign - #SoloSelfie.....	26
GoPro Advertising Campaign - #GoPro.....	30
Online Celebrities' Advertising Career	33
Results	35
Discussion.....	37
Conclusion.....	39
References.....	42

Appendix	47
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SELFIE USAGE IN MARKETING
BETWEEN COMPANIES AND CONSUMERS

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Master of Science degree in Communication & Media Technologies

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Abstract

This case study analysis focuses on the use of selfies by both companies and consumers in relation to certain products. By using uses and gratifications theory, this case study analysis investigates four major companies and their products, as well as their implementation of user-generated selfies. Selfie-posting and other related interactions between consumers and companies suggest effective marketing of both consumers' self-images, (i.e., consumers' intentions of obtaining social capital by posting selfies) and companies' products. Finally, this case study analysis also suggests a healthy and productive marketing result between consumers and products with the use of selfies.

Keywords: selfie, uses and gratification, social capital, marketing

Selfie Usage in Marketing Between Companies and Consumers

When I was a child in China, I lived a life where there were very few electronics. People watched black and white televisions at home, listened to radios that had very bad sound quality compared to modern radios, and people use paper-based letters to communicate with others. Somewhere during my teenage when I got access to those old-school cellphones, I was surprised and amazed by the “unthinkable” technology offered by them – the 0.8 megapixel built-in camera. That was kind of a tool that made me aware of something gradually changing around myself.

By the time I was still trying to figure out the real function of those cameras and how to better utilize it without spending more money, I gradually discovered that many people, especially friends with capability of purchasing cellphones with cameras, had started their online lives. They began to store their own photos inside their own “online spaces,” which was similar to Facebook nowadays.

Rather than feeling surprised about the photos shared online, I became extremely curious when I saw photos of one’s face were also being saved online; At the same time, more and more people’s behaviors of uploading “face shots” online added even more curiosity. Those photos, some seemed accurate in depicting oneself while others seemed abstractive, made myself and many others thought that people had changed aesthetically—they no longer care about their own appearances shown online anymore.

This whole “industry” became even more energetic when front-facing cameras made it much easier for people to take photos of themselves, and this accelerated the selfie phenomenon. In addition, some of the street advertisements began to feature photos of people using products. These developments made me interested in figuring out the mechanism “behind the scene.” But first of all, it is necessary to introduce photography, which is the basic technology for producing photographs.

With the development of digital photography, cameras are getting more and more accessible to ordinary consumers. Unlike the old days where film cameras were dominant format of photography that viewing a photograph takes a huge amount of time because of complex film-developing procedures, digital cameras are able to allow consumers to see what they shot right away. Nowadays, cellphones include digital cameras. Smartphones like iPhones and other brands even feature two digital cameras – regular cameras that face away from the user, and front-facing cameras directly facing users. With front-facing camera-enabled smartphones, people began to take more and more photos of themselves being the dominant object in the frame. Not until the year of 2013, almost eight years after the first discussion of selfie by photographer Jim Krause, did the word “selfie” being recorded by the Oxford Dictionary* to describe the way people take photos of themselves.

The convenience of digital cameras on smartphones and more accessible and reliable internet connections made socialization easier than before. The development of internet has also become “an integral part of daily life,” it provides numerous benefits to both consumers and advertisers (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). By the year of 1996, the advantages of internet usage had already been discovered that high interactivity with low costs regardless of distance and time made internet popular as a communication tool (Berthon, Pitt, & Watson, 1996). So convenient and effective, the internet is considered a “virtual marketplace” that enables consumers to interact with products widely available even in real life (Ko et al., 2005). Selfies were active when “Myspace” was still popular. Later on, Facebook, Snapchat, and other social network sites were becoming popular with selfie posts. While social network sites provide a reliable platform for selfie posters, companies of well-known products started to utilize selfies posted by consumers in association with their products. All of a sudden, major companies like Coca-Cola, Beats Electronics, and GoPro are trying to get their customers upload selfies of themselves next to their products.

This phenomenon is not limited to major companies; other smaller brands such as cosmetic products are utilizing online celebrities to promote their products during those online celebrities’ selfie-dominated “shows.” The result of such marketing strategy – the use of consumer-generated selfies, yield to more people interested in the

product. For example, the use of selfies in Coca-Cola products made people more jealous and interested in having a bottle of Coca-Cola just in order to feel the same level of fulfillment expressed by the selfies used in the Coca-Cola marketing advertisement. There will be more examples in the latter part of the paper to illustrate the relationship between selfies and consumers' feelings about the product.

Another phenomenon is found to be interesting during the process of research – there are several selfie posters appear in the marketing campaign for multiple times. Despite the fact that companies only offer one-time only coupon for anyone who upload selfies online, and opportunities of getting rewards are not 100% guaranteed, people are not stopped; instead, they post selfies online with products only to show themselves. This thesis is to explain the phenomenon using uses and gratification theory and the term “social capital.”

In order to examine the relationship between selfie posting and product/self-marketing, selfies used in marketing major brands and products will be analyzed to show how selfies play a role of promoting a certain product, how selfie posters get to promote themselves, and what do they get from posting selfies online. At the same time, this article also illustrates how products are being promoted by an already-famous online celebrity in China, and what role does the famousness of the celebrity plays in the process of marketing a certain product (i.e., how important social capital is when

trying to promote a certain product). Since the word “selfie” existed for such a short period, there are not a huge amount of articles, nor many uses of selfies by companies in the process of marketing their products. However, by examining the effect of selfie usage and the relationship between selfie posting and self-promotion, this article, in a form of case study analysis, suggests a healthy cycle that can be a “win-win” solution in the process of marketing both the selfie-positing individual and product.

Literature Review

Photography Versus Selfie

In order to talk about selfie, the first thing we need to mention is photography. Although the word “selfie” was firstly being discussed about in 2005 by photographer Jim Krause (2005), and later appeared in the dictionary in 2013, the format of “selfie” can be dated back to 1839 when photographer Robert Cornelius accidentally got himself in the shot when trying to figure out what was happening with the camera system (Cornelius, 1839). Despite the crappy quality of the shot, it still considered the first selfie in the world. It was not until the year of 1900 did the actual Kodak Brownie box camera being invented that made self-portraiture popular (Lutz, n.d.).

Being a type of photography, selfies nowadays are more based on digital cameras thanks to the state-of-the-art technology. Smartphones with digital cameras are so accessible that made it easy for ordinary camera users to “depict ourselves in the way

that we desire” “as a new kind of ‘identity development’ tool that makes up keep pace of this new era of social communication (Tsilimparis, 2015). Compare to the old-school camera systems that contain actual films to be developed before anything can show up on photographers, this new invention not only combines the technology that allows consumers to see things in the shot right away. Furthermore, it also provides people that are digitally connected to the online communities every day, ubiquitously, if paired with working internet connection and social network platform (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016).

Another feature of the selfie is that they no longer require being printed out, just like other photos shot by digital cameras. Instead of being printed out and distributed as a hard copy in order to broadcast the figure in the photo to other groups of people, materials are now being saved, and photographs are now “considered immaterial phenomena” that are meant to be distributed electronically on the internet (Rawlings, 2013). Photographers or selfie takers are comparably more amateurish than photographers are in old times that, in my opinion, indicate the transition from the old “photographic technician” to the 21st century’s “cultural shapers” (Rawlings, 2013). When talking about “cultural shapers,” we can refer it to ordinary people who take pictures of anything with a cheap digital camera, such as a built-in camera on a smartphone. Pictures taken by these people was once called “boring pictures” as those

pictures no longer involve “value judgment” because it is very easy to take a shot and delete it then take another one if the picture turned out to be disappointing (Batchen, 2008). However, it does not stop ordinary “cultural shapers” from taking pictures of everything, including themselves, because “they are a folk art that is already expanding the language and lexicon of photography” (Saltz, 2014).

When I took my very first black and white photography class back in California, I was taught that photography is a tool for photographers to express themselves visually in the form of photos. The way you take a picture and the way you develop it is tightly associated with your own feeling, experience, and understanding of the subject matter in the frame. Selfies, in fact, is a form of photography that digitally create, express, and convey the feeling of the selfie taker when the selfie is being photographed. Selfie, if coupled with internet and social network platform, is able to “make it easier for individuals to communicate and to connect” to other people “to express themselves in an online environment (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

With this accessible and convenient feature offered by smartphones, people began to ubiquitously take selfies and share them on social networks. The amount of selfies taken within a day had reached 93 million selfies, only on Android platform (Brandt, 2014). Although some people argue that “selfie echoes in Van Gogh’s amazing self-portraits – some of the same intensity, immediacy, and need to reveal something

inner to the outside world in the most vivid way possible,” others may still say it shows “an extraordinary moment, photographed to incorporate the shooter’s own astonishment” (Saltz, 2014). So many selfies that also made people suspect that the selfie-taking “is either reflecting or promoting what many see as growing narcissism in contemporary culture” (Rawling, 2013). For example, see Figure A.

Semiotics, Gaze, and Narcissism

When talking about narcissism, I believe it has strong relationship with semiotics, and subsequent gaze, either coming from men or women. Semiotics refers to signs, objects, or signals that “conveys meaning” (Schroeder, 2016). The ability of interpret signifiers carried by signs are natural to human beings. Since semiotics exist everywhere in the world, it not only affect people and have them gazed upon if they are interested in the conveyed semiotics, but also affect marketing communications, as this article will mention later in marketing section. Signifiers are “living and breathing and begging to be decoded (Tupot & Stock, 2014), and signifiers included in selfies would have strong relationship with a person’s taste, which is also being mentioned in the next section.

For example, if a picture is featuring a child laughing and playing with his or her toys, it conveys the signifiers that signifies the viewer that the child is happy, and he or she is enjoying the moment as of the photo being taken. Viewers, if interested in the

photo and its expression of child's happiness, would pay attention and gaze at the photo for at least several seconds. Another example could be naked female body that is constantly being "overexposed" in magazines. Although Bordo (Martin, 2015) asserts that those "overexposed" nudities exist for long time "do not call for alarm and were not bothersome," they do attract attentions or gazes from males who are interested in women. Therefore, gaze would take place when someone is interested in the object. Theresa and Nancy found an even better word that replaces "gaze" by "grab" when it comes to describing the viewers' process of consuming selfies circulated online.

Selfies, especially those appear online, mostly feature bodies, including but not limited to one's face. Because selfies "frequently trigger perceptions of self-indulgence or attention-seeking social dependence" that are deemed either "narcissistic" or lack of self-esteem (Rutledge, 2013), the cycle of taking selfies, posting selfies online and getting gazed upon starts and will not stop for a long time. Since John Berger's argument about women's "little control over the representations of their bodies and subjectivities" in 1970s, the statement – "men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" long-lived in our society (Berger, 1973). For selfies, like Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym explain in a recent article, the reason for selfies to be frequently featured in the public imagination is that, for a long time, selfies "have been predominant themes of mediated images" (Senft & Baym, 2015). Speak of "mediated images," selfies, with the signifiers

like “the body of the photographer (the outstretched arm, the craned neck, the work to get it all in the frame) dominates the frame, shows a “self-enacting itself” and invite spectators to reflect on the “very instability of the term ‘self’” (Senft & Baym, 2015).

Regarding narcissism, it is not limited to describe the repeated actions of taking selfies, but repeatedly “invite viewers to think of identity “between the self as an image and as a body, as a constructed effect of representation and as an object and agent of representation” (Senft & Baym, 2015). Invited viewers, whether gazed at the selfie or not, are expected to respond to the selfie through gestures such as “like,” “retweet” and “comment,” or even “take reaction selfies (Senft & Baym, 2015). This chain of events, starting from selfie takes taking a selfie, posting it online and acquiring gazes if possible, and then waiting for responses from viewers, would forms up the narcissism.

Taste, Social Capital, and Megaphone Effect

Different people have their different viewpoints, preferences and ways of interpreting things around themselves, these differences can be defined as different tastes. Taste is a kind of “critical judgment, discernment, or appreciation” of subject matters, or a “manner or aesthetic quality indicative of such discernment or appreciation” (Taste, 2016). Taste can be indefinite, fuzzy, and inaccurate, but it can be explained by what a person experienced in the past of their lives (Schindler & Holbrook, 1993). Although tastes can vary from person to person, tastes dominated

work in consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this thesis, instead of talking about flavors in food, or any other characteristics, taste is limited to people's opinions on photographs or selfies.

While hundreds of thousands of selfies are being posted online onto social network platforms, researchers began to look into this phenomenon to try to understand how selfies managed to become popular among online communities. Some people believe that selfie takes' tastes brings selfies "into being as problematic," while others suggest that the problematic selfie led to "acceptance of discipline especially targeted at young women" (Foucault, 1977). This "young women" specific reference suggests that female is taking more selfies, and there are more female selfie takers comparably. Take a close look at selfies posted by different people, one of the most common way of taking a selfie is using gesture like "duck face" or at least showing his or her face as the dominant object in the frame. No matter whether selfie takers' appearances are considered as beautiful or not, people keep taking selfies, as a way of documenting the "moment of taste" of him or herself. Although some of them would keep selfies as secret photos and save them in their phones, others would love to share that "moment of taste" online and let the online community consume that selfie, regardless of whether the community likes it or not.

When we talk about the action of selfie takers sharing selfies online and broadcast his or her specific taste, we need to mention the term “megaphone effect” defined by another group of researchers (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). Although in their definition, megaphone effect describes idea that individuals use the internet to share their own tastes, and selfie-sharing, whether welcomed by the online community or not, features the characteristic of megaphone effect. When selfies feature “advanced qualities” (i.e., qualities that are widely welcomed, such as special tastes of certain products), the effect of megaphone effect is more obvious. For example, selfies created by fashion bloggers carries their special tastes in variety of topics involving clothing, cosmetics, and so on. Those individuals, without professional experience, post their own consumptions through the use of selfies to acquire mass audiences (McQuarrie et al., 2013). By sharing the process of choosing, evaluating, and engaging with clothing (or any other topics), individuals “garner a large of audiences” (McQuarrie et al., 2013). With more and more attention given to those individuals, social capital is granted in exchange of their own taste. This social capital, useful for “securing benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures,” is one of the vital reasons for selfie posters to maintain their online profile (Rojas, Shah, & Friedland, 2011).

Another reason for selfie posters to keep posting their own tastes is to seek gratifications in the process of both posting selfies and receiving positive comments about the postings.

The Uses and Gratification Theory

Media usage has been growing since the popularity of internet. Early in 1940s when technologies were still underdeveloped with mere basic and traditional communication approaches available, researchers began to analyze the relationship between people and their use of those communication approaches (Richard & Turner, 2014). By the end of 1970s, the uses and gratification theory established to explain people's intention and motivations of using media.

There are many intensions and motivations for users to maintain their usage of media, especially those media based on internet. Three main gratifications were theorized by researches that, during the process of internet usage, people acquire gratifications from researching contents online, experiencing browsing process, and being tied with online society (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2014). For social media usage, the need of social and affection, similar to being tied with online society in regular internet usage, is considered the main gratification users are pursuing (Louis, 2013).

Regarding selfie posting and selfie usage, the uses and gratification theory applies too. In a recent research (Tanta, Mihovilović, & Sablić, 2014), authors focused on people's use of social media, and investigated the relationship between extensive usage of social media and people's subsequent acquisition of gratification. The paper came to a result that behaviors such as posting selfies, presenting lifestyles, and communicating personal interests, are considered as tools for self-presentation (Tanta et al., 2014). By mentioning five groups of human needs such as cognitive needs, affective needs, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and escapism (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973), the article argues that posting selfies for self-presentation grants users aforementioned needs. On the other hand, with the added benefit of "social capital" that can be later used in promoting selfie takers, it is more likely for selfie takers to continue taking selfies and participate in the group of selfie-sharing community.

Self-marketing and Product Marketing With Selfies

With the ability to acquire social capitals and obtain gratifications at the same time, selfie takers are making the most of taking selfies. While social network platforms are getting more and more popular online, selfies are easier to be distributed and be seen by others. The chain of events is so noticeable that companies are beginning to think about selfies differently (Armstrong, 2015). Besides that, researches also stated, "instead of dismissing selfies as simple narcissism, brands should explore how to

harness this cultural shift” (Armstrong, 2015). Having realized the unique characteristic of the combination of selfies and social network platform, companies began to acquire selfies taken by customers positively. By utilizing the narcissistic characteristic of selfie takers combined with the incorporation of topics in relation to brands, companies managed to put selfies as their “front-page” news to showoff how happy their customers are while they interacted with the product of the company.

On the other hand, selfies on social networks reached a new “milestone” that selfie takers who acquired huge amount of social capital are now even more popular on the internet. Take Tavi Gevinson as an example, she is now a very famous fashion blogger for what she had done with selfies online. At the age of 14, Gevinson had been named one of “the 25 most influential teens of 2014” by *Time* magazine (Time, 2014). Instead of keeping posting selfies on her own, companies started to use her to promote their products. In the latter parts of this paper, major companies’ promotions will be analyzed as well.

Since companies have begun to utilize selfies to promote their products, it is necessary to look into the mechanism/rationale behind the scene. This case study analysis will look into some major advertising campaigns, their choices of elements involved in the construction of advertising campaigns, and feedbacks selfie posters get by posting selfies, and how that feedback promote themselves that initiated their

intention of posting more selfies. In order to complete the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions are formed:

Research Questions:

- RQ1. How uses of selfies manage to promote a company's product?
- RQ2. How uses of selfies manage to promote selfie taker themselves?
- RQ3. What characteristics do selfies illustrate when selected for effective marketing image?

Method

In order to examine selfies and the interaction between selfies and product promotions, major companies' selfie marketing campaigns were selected and analyzed, in terms of the time the advertising campaign appeared, people involved, elements used in the campaign, result of the campaign, feedback, effectiveness of the campaign, as well as other related properties about the advertising campaign. Furthermore, concepts mentioned in the literature review section are used to illustrate the mechanism of product promotion using selfies. The reason why cases like Coca Cola advertising campaign, Beats Electronics advertising campaign, GoPro, and online celebrity examples are selected for this analysis is that those are considerably major companies that produce well-known products. Those companies' products affect people in a way

that not only products are being popularized among them, but also promote selfies incorporated in those products.

Coca-Cola Advertising Campaign - #SelfieSweeps, Share a Coke.

This advertising campaign was one of the first advertising campaigns featuring user-generated selfies initiated by the Coca Cola Company in Atlanta, GA. In cooperation with Twitter, Spotify, and other related organizations, Share a Coke successfully promoted Coca Cola product to people across the country. Initiated from July 1st, 2014 to August 31st, 2014, this two-month advertising campaign offers participants with possible concert tickets for posting selfies on their platform. Figure B shows the original website for the advertising campaign to take place.

On the website, participants were able to see other people's uploads, their interaction with the product, upload their own selfies, and share their postings to their friends. Using Twitter or Instagram, selfie posters needed to tag the selfie postings with either “#ShareACoke” or “#SelfieSweeps” to indicate photos' dedication to the Coca Cola product. The advertising campaign refreshes its result every week for nine weeks, and there are 400 selfies required in order for a concert ticket being gifted. For those who did not win the concert ticket, but were so active to participate into the campaign that they were the first 10 to post their selfies online, will be gifted with a month of Spotify Premium.

Once inside the gallery webpage, viewers get access to other peoples' postings. Immediately after seeing those selfies, you can feel the emotions involved in every single one of them, that is, selfies illustrated on this webpage show happiness at all times. No matter how far you scroll down the page, there is always a feeling of an emotion, for example, happiness. At the same time, all the photos are more or less featuring Coca Cola product. The relationship between the product and people's emotions were being tied together at this time, so that anyone else seeing those selfies would feel the combination of a specific emotion and the product.

In this advertising campaign, many signifiers convey useful meanings. For example, in Figure C, a female selfie taker has a can of Coke in her hand. This is one of the simple selfies shown in the advertising campaign. The dominant signifiers are beauty and happiness of the female. On one hand, the simple smile of the girl is eye-catching, at least to a viewer like me. The smile, combined with the can of Coca Cola in her hand, makes it easier for the whole picture to reflect the happiness of the girl in relation to the product. On the other hand, at the moment she presses the shutter button of her camera, she records the happiness along with the can of Coca Cola in her hand, to express the indirect relationship between the product and her happiness as well as the beauty of the girl, which are two basic signifiers of this specific selfie.

Those signifiers signify viewers that the female is somehow beautiful, and she is happy drinking the can of Coke. This selfie has the potential of acquiring gazes from people who are interested in her beauty; at the same time, as one of the selfies on this website, this selfie adds more feeling of happiness to the already existing group of selfies that signify happiness. By looking at this individual selfie, people would feel that they would likely to get appreciated aesthetically and get as happy as she is after purchasing and consuming the Coca Cola product.

Figure D shows an old woman holding a bottle of Coca Cola while sitting at a place similar to a backyard of a house with personal plants around. Although this selfie does not show common signifiers like obvious happiness or beauty like other selfies on the website, it shows something different, and targets specific audience quite effectively. The backyard background signifies peacefulness and serene of the old woman's life. The personal plant added the feeling of serene and freedom of her life as well. Although there isn't a direct indication of happiness through apparent facial emotion of the old woman, the combination of the feeling of peacefulness, serene, and freedom indirectly indicated the happiness of the old woman's life, which is interesting enough for audiences around the same age. By looking at the selfie, it is easy for viewers to think that they would get similar lifestyle and feeling of serene just by purchasing and consuming a bottle of Coca Cola.

In the perspective of the Coca Cola company, the use of selfies to express individual emotions effectively promoted the product. It not only interacted with consumers, but also created a win-win situation that is beneficial to both the company's product and consumers.

In the perspective of selfie posters, the participation to the advertising campaign not only offers selfie posters a chance to express themselves online, but also gives them a chance to acquire bonuses such as a concert ticket and Spotify premium. This is one of the reasons why so many selfie posters submitted their selfies online so that 400 objective is met every week; however on the contrary, people also get attentions from others when posting selfies. Take a look at the Figure E, this selfie poster actually got likes from others online for posting selfies. In Figure F, some of the selfies posters appeared for more than once. While making up the 400-posting requirement for a concert ticket being gifted, those who posted their selfies more than once gets a little bit more attention compare to others. The gratification selfie posters get are from not only the bonus concert ticket, but also the feeling of being gazed.

Apple Inc. Advertising Campaign - #SoloSelfie

Beats Electronics, a consumer electronics company formerly called Beats by Dr. Dre, had been promoting one of the most famous headphone brand in the world. Now owned by Apple Inc, it is trying new ways to promote their headphone products.

Recently, as the world's best-selling headphone (Dilger, 2014), the Beats Solo2 initiated a completely different way of promoting the product – The use of selfies in a short video format. This format, although in video format, is still considered as selfie because of its unchanged characteristic – featuring headshot of a person. Instead of using plain user-generated selfies, the company initiated the advertising campaign by inviting already-famous celebrities to perform a series of “templates” to show how this type of selfies were being manipulated as shown in the Figure G. With more than 20 celebrities, the company is incorporating this new way of documenting an individual, and is trying to “reinventing the selfie” in a playful way (Dilger, 2014). Other than “templates” illustrated by those celebrities, the company also created a series of tutorials for consumers to understand how to shoot the new “selfie” and how to compile the footage into a video file to be finally uploaded online.

Similar to the Coca Cola Company, Apple Inc. is one step forward – using a format that shows more than still image. On the other hand, this format allows more emotions to be transmitted to the viewers. Starting from those celebrities, not only show up as examples, but also share their own feeling of integration with the product. In terms of signifiers, there definitely a lot of them dominating viewers' eyes. Take a look at the Figure H, this is an example of celebrity-involved selfie. There are a lot of things going on in the selfie, whether in motion or not. The background features a many

elements that considered to be luxurious – big mirror-like wall plus a high-end hotel room setting, make the scene standout. On the other hand, the beauty of the celebrity and happiness of her face, as well as her companion behind her using hair blower while being scantily clad in front of the camera illustrates a fully relaxed lifestyle. The beauty and luxury life would definitely interest many people who are willing or interested in living a similar life, thus induce gazes from people who are interested. All those signifiers play important roles in this selfie video that says a lot to the viewers. For example, female viewers would feel as beautiful as the celebrity once she acquires a pair of Beats Solo2 headphone. Similarly, viewers would feel likely to get the similar level of luxury in their lives simply by getting a pair of Beats Solo2 headphones.

Other than those celebrity-based selfies postings, inspired consumers are also suggested to upload their own selfies, without the limitation of format – still photos and short videos are all acceptable. Similarly, by using the hashtag, selfie posters get categorized and promoted on social networks at the same time. From the perspective of the company, it is another chance to showcase their products in real life. Take a look at the Figure I, J, and K. Based on the technique introduced in the tutorials and celebrity-involved templates, users began to interact with this type of selfie. In this specific case, the man travels to different places in United Kingdom, and shot selfies along the way. Finally, he compiled clips into a short video showing his interaction with the

headphone while travelling to beautiful places. Regarding signifiers, they are obvious enough to make people interested in and feel jealous about him. First, his traveling experience shown in the short selfie video illustrates his happiness on his way travelling around the UK. This primary element is to directly influence the viewers that they would also get the chance to travel around while listening to their music using such a quality headphone.

Another important element the advertising campaign is trying to advertise is the level of playfulness users are to get after purchasing the product. Take a look at this next group of screenshots (see Figure L, M, and N). This selfie short video shows three people from a family. Using the same technique, this selfie features not only the younger brother, but also the son and the father all enjoying music using the headphone. The already-playful technique allowed even more relaxation and happiness to be documented and transmitted to the viewers. Since the playfulness and happiness are two major signifiers in this case, viewers are easily influenced so that they would feel getting the same level of happiness and relaxation if they purchase the product.

Almost all the selfie short videos feature playfulness and happiness, just like those celebrity-based selfie short videos. For selfie posters, posting selfie videos online allows themselves to be promoted on the social network at the same time. They get not only likes, but also appreciations from either friends or strangers online. The

gratifications they get in this case is obvious – likes, comments, and promotions on the official website. For celebrity-based selfie short videos, gratifications are reflected by repeatedly participate in the making of high-quality “templates” and video-shootings with different backgrounds.

GoPro Advertising Campaign - #GoPro

GoPro is another company featuring selfies in video format. Because of its products’ characteristics, video clips are becoming more and more popular when it comes to GoPro advertising campaigns. Instead of asking people to upload still images, GoPro actually wants its consumers to mount their GoPro cameras somewhere on their body while they do activities. As a result, the emotions spread out are not merely happiness, but something unique.

GoPro Rewards, shown in Figure O, was set up to attract consumers to upload their clips showing themselves doing unique things. No matter what they do in the video, they have to show their individual personality, either in form of headshot in conjunction with emotions or expressions, or in form of first-person-view shots. The mechanism of uploading selfies is similar – using hashtags on social networks such as Twitter and Instagram. In Figure P, the person in the shot clearly uses a selfie stick. The wide angle lens is another representation of the GoPro camera. With more than 1100 likes and over 600 retweets, this selfie is more influential compare to the

aforementioned ones. In the selfie, signifiers are beautiful scenery, wide-angle-lens-enabled visual distortion, as well as the missing selfie stick and camera.

For GoPro cameras, one of the most important feature is the durability and versatility of the machine itself. When this selfie taker brought her GoPro to a place where the environment is harsh, such as the cold places, it has to be able to work in order to take beautiful pictures. In this case, by showing herself and the camera, the selfie taker expresses her special chance of coming to this place and take the stunning photograph using the camera. The missing selfie stick signifies the lightness of the camera body, which make other heavy camera users jealous because coming to this place with heavy cameras won't be as enjoyable as her. Of course, the beautiful scenery also signifies the special opportunity of travelling to this resort. Viewers, when exposed to this kind of selfie, may think that purchasing the GoPro camera would allow them to go to places like the Crater Lake without carrying heavy equipment. On the other hand, the beautiful scenery may also make viewers think that they would definitely take more beautiful pictures once they make purchase of the GoPro camera.

For companies, the product can be promoted as long as there are positive benefit shown in the user-generated selfies or video clips. For example, in the first-person-view shots in Figure Q, the benefit of enjoying the process of surfing while documenting the event shows the great benefit of having the camera with you. The versatility of the

camera allows user not having the need to worry about potential hazards camera may encounter. As a result, those signifiers would suggest viewers the benefit of having this portable camera while doing activities. This is also what the company wanted their promotions to be in the advertising campaign.

On the official website of GoPro cameras, one graph fully explains the mechanism behind the scene. As shown in the Figure R, the cycle starts from selfie takers taking selfie or selfie videos. The next step would be submitting the content created by selfie takers. Those selected works would then be appreciated and promoted on their official website, which stimulates selfie takers to keep making selfies or selfie videos so that the cycle can continue. In this case, the monetary award as well as promotions on the official website and official twitter page give selfie posters a great deal of gratifications, thus people would continue posting short videos and form the cycle.

GoPro, Coca Cola Company, and Beats Electronics are using selfies or short videos with simply signifiers, and the benefit of company's promotion of a certain selfie poster is not obvious until a huge amount of selfie poster's social capital has been accumulated. That, along with the megaphone effect mentioned before, really makes difference when it comes to online celebrities.

Online Celebrities' Advertising Career

Online celebrities refer to a group of people online that is popular. Most of them start their career by expressing themselves online, write anonymously, and focus on special topic (Rich, 2009). When their ideas or expressions stand out from others', they become famous. Similarly, posting selfies online to reveal special taste of something was a form of expression, and the special taste stands out from the general perspective. For example, Tavi Gevinson, one of the famous online celebrities, started her career by posting selfies online and commenting other people's blogs. Gradually, she became famous online, and she accumulated so much social capital that companies started to use her as a strategic marketing tool. In figure S, the young Tavi Gevinson appears in a fashion magazine, appears to be good looking. However, some people may say that she is merely okay because other girls, if coupled with the same photographer and apply similar cosmetic products and lighting, may be as good looking. In this case, when Tavi Gevinson accumulated so much social capital, she herself becomes a brand, and that is the reason why she is different from other people. By expressing her own thoughts online and sharing her own tastes, she successfully grabs the megaphone, and let others understand her taste, thus she gains social capital by doing so.

Similarly, in China, there is a young woman named Mofan Zhang, who is currently the representative of online celebrities in China. Mofan's career started by

posting her own selfies online, acquiring likes, receiving comments, and gathering appreciations from the online community. As time goes by, she accumulated over 5 million followers, so much social capital that she no longer needs to be promoted. Nowadays, except for posting videos online and checking in with her followers every day, she establishes her own company and promotes cosmetics using her own self-image. In her weekly cosmetic tutorials, she would feature several brands and those brands are now grown up. Look at the Figure T, which shows the screenshot of Mofan Zhang's weekly tutorial. In this selfie-like screenshot, there are a lot of signifiers that are useful for promoting herself and the product. The beauty of Mofan herself, the whitened skin tone with the use of a soft box, and the cute hairband are all signifiers. Target audiences are mostly female viewers who want to become as beautiful as possible. By looking at her skin, and listening to her tutorial on those cosmetics, viewers would think that it is because of those cosmetics that her skin would feel so good. The cuteness of the hairband also attracts attentions and gazes from male viewers who would eventually consider buying products for their girlfriends. The already-famous online celebrity would make such a difference that viewers would not be purchasing anything if the products were being promoted by someone else, someone not as famous as her.

Results

After analyzing several major companies' advertising campaigns, it seems companies have successfully promoted their products using selfies posted by selfie posters online. Associated with the social network sites, selfies play an important role to companies that understand the value of selfies and other similar form of user-generated contents. From Coca Cola Company to Apple Inc., it is clear that selfies with simple signifiers work out the best despite the fact that short video format of selfie file were used when it comes to Apple's promotional selfie short videos. By showing the happiness of selfie posters and some basic elements such as natural backgrounds and people's natural beauty in association with the selfie posters' interactions with the products, the advertising campaign successfully promoted both of the companies' products. Since part of the reasons why selfie posters upload selfies were because of the bonuses provided by the company, the effect of megaphone effect is not obvious thus the advertising campaign of GoPro and online celebrities' way of promoting themselves are different.

Regarding GoPro, the use of short video format to express selfie-posters' uniqueness is the most important feature of the GoPro product. Instead of simply showing the object's beauty or emotions, it allows selfie posters to incorporate live environment in the shot, which is much better attracting attentions and comments from

online communities. As a result, selfie posters are getting comparatively more gratifications thus more works are done and submitted to the website to promote the product. The cycle introduced in the GoPro section is very similar to the healthy cycle this paper is trying to find out.

The megaphone effect along with the uses and gratification theory's characteristics are more obvious when it comes to online celebrities and product promotions. By posting selfies online and participate in online activities such as selfie-related advertising campaigns, selfie posters get the chance to not only acquire gratifications from getting awards offered by companies, but also the gratification of being promoted along the way. At the same time, when selfie posters post their photos or short videos online, they are trying to use the megaphone to spread out their taste of the subject matter in the shot. When they get comments, or followers because of their posted works, they get the social capital. Online celebrities, after acquired huge amount of social capital, become so popular that he or she is considered a brand. The benefit of the healthy cycle is the ability to develop the social capital and use the social capital as the condition to promote other things, including selfie posters themselves.

The mechanism, or the healthy cycle indicates the ability for selfies to promote a company's product. By using the attractive elements shown in selfies posted by selfie posters, companies are able to grasp consumers' psychological needs, i.e., the feeling of

achieving the selfie posters' illustrated scenarios by purchasing related products, so that their products get promoted. On the other hand, posting selfies online gives selfie posters a chance to display themselves. Moreover, by offering better platforms for selfie posters to upload their media, selfie posters get better gratifications and promotions.

For characteristics selfies expose in advertising campaigns, useful signifiers, such as beauty, luxury, happiness, playfulness, and peacefulness are elements or characteristics that play important role in selfie-related advertising campaigns. Combined with the previous relationship between consumers and products, the effective selfie usage is able to promote the product successfully.

Discussion

The three major companies' advertising campaigns made clear reflections on concepts introduced in the literature review section. Understanding those concepts, especially during the process of marketing using user-generated contents such as selfies, would make the marketing process considerably more effective. First of all, when talking about semiotics, the power signifiers, one of the most important terms that describes the elements exist in selfies that is meaningful, is not to be underestimated. Because of those signifiers, such as happiness, laughs on people's faces, beauty, luxury, and even peacefulness implied by background objects indirectly and potentially convey meanings simply by displaying those characteristics in the

image. For example, when model exhibit happiness on his or her face in a photograph, it reflects happiness that can be perceived by the audiences; when the background of a photograph is set up with peaceful objects such as flowers and household animals, people would understand the feeling of the peacefulness implied by the photograph.

With semiotics dominating the meanings expressed by different selfies, we have to take the subsequent responses into consideration, such as gazes because of interest, and narcissism because of expression of unique signifiers. Although narcissism is not obviously illustrated in the advertising campaigns at this time, as one of the five personality traits, it plays important role in determine people's intentions in communications.

This case study analysis is based on available studies and research, and is explaining the potential relationship between the selfie usage and effective marketing. Since there lack some connection between the selfie-usage and field of marketing in the database, this article is also trying to fill the gap. Understanding selfies can be a significant step in understanding social media at this time when selfie is playing an important role in social media and communication, thus this article acts like a bridge between the phenomena of selfie usage and the field of marketing.

Conclusion

The use of selfies in today's field of marketing is becoming more and more popular as the society realizes the importance of incorporating user-generated contents such as selfies. This case study analysis is trying to illustrate the relationship between the use of selfies and the effective marketing through concepts illustrated in some already-established research and articles. As a result, anyone who is interested in marketing can refer to this case study analysis as guide to effectively market their products. On the other hand, those who are interested in the relationship between selfies and selfie-promoted products can also refer to this case study analysis and might find it to be interesting to conduct further analyses. This case study analysis also points out the importance of understanding selfies as an important medium in social media and communication.

The lack of research examples and real-world marketing examples indicates that the marketing procedures involving the use of selfies can be ineffective at some point, and that is the time for this case study analysis to make difference. The concepts introduced in this case study analysis, such as the Megaphone Effects introduced by McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips can be useful in directing marketing procedures in order for it to become more effectiveness. Utilizing the concept illustrated in the Uses

and Gratification Theories would also allow marketing intentions to be topical that targets appropriate audiences.

However, on the other hand, this thesis also yields weaknesses such as inadequate sample selections. By analyzing four major companies' advertising campaigns is somehow not enough to estimate the true effect of selfies utilized in the process of marketing. What's more, the selfie used in the advertising campaigns may only reflect the relationship between user-generated content and the effectiveness of the selfies in a limited timeframe. Due to the freshness of the topic, there lack representative companies and other types of examples to further articulate the relationship between selfies usage and effectiveness of marketing. The aforementioned narcissism, as well as the relationship between selfies and marketing, can be better explained if more examples and be analyzed and more specific research methods such as surveys and other quantitative and qualitative research methods are used. This weakness leads to future research topics.

After all, this case study analysis explains the relationship between selfie usage and effective marketing by emphasizing the importance of understanding the uses and gratification theories – understanding uses and gratification theories allows us to perceive media users' behaviors and reasons behind those behaviors. On the other hand, understanding the concepts such as megaphone effects and semiotics may be

helpful in making marketing procedures more effective, as those concepts can be vital to understanding social media and communication. Although this case analysis does not provide a complete set of concepts or theories exist in the world when it comes to either marketing or selfie usage, it does provide clues that will aid anyone who is interested in understanding social media and communications with applicable concepts and theories. Furthermore, the aforementioned estimations, research questions, as well as results would play an important role in clarifying the relationship between selfie usage and effective marketing. As the result, better marketing decisions can be made once concepts and theories introduced in this case study analysis are interpreted.

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Appendix



Figure A. A girl taking a selfie of herself in her place.

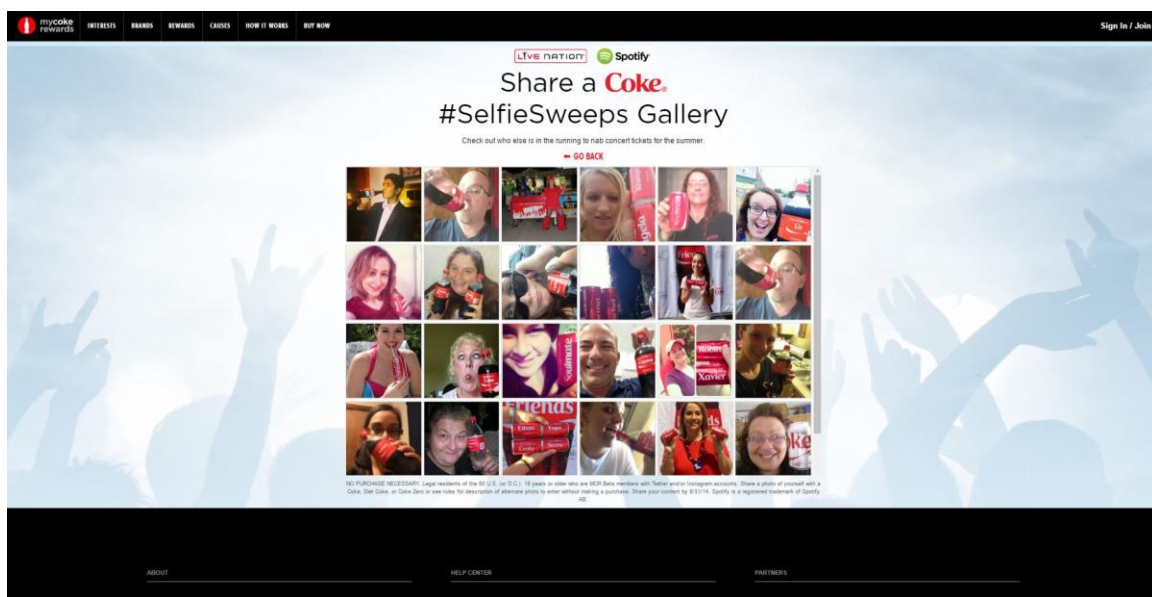


Figure B. The screenshot of the homepage of Share A Coke website.

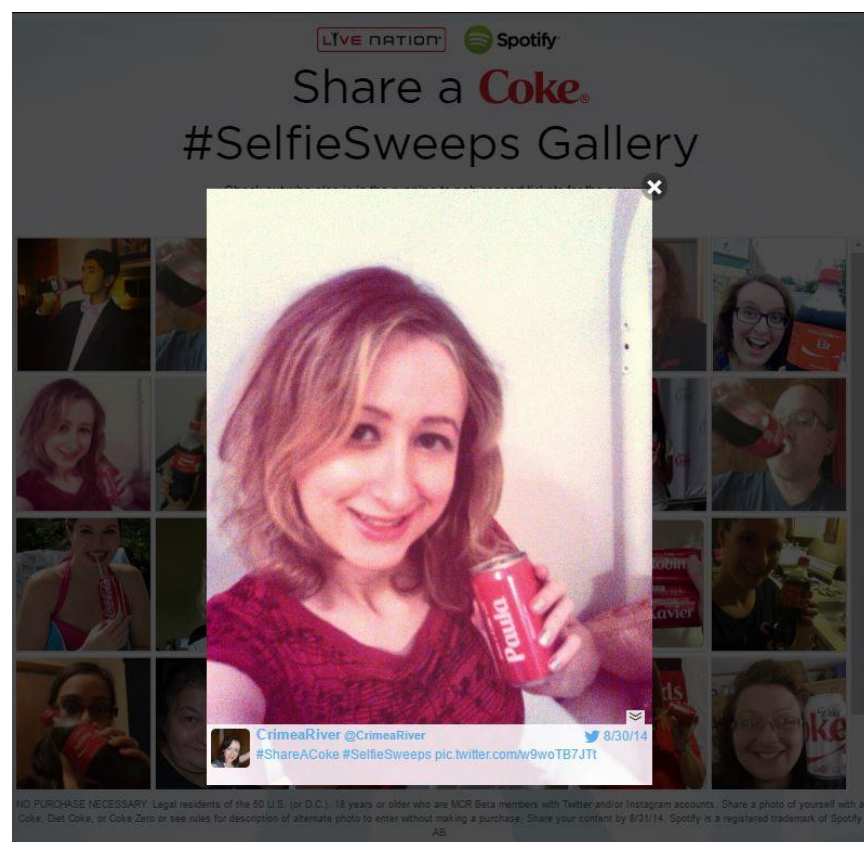


Figure C. Screenshot of the seventh girl of the user-uploaded selfies.

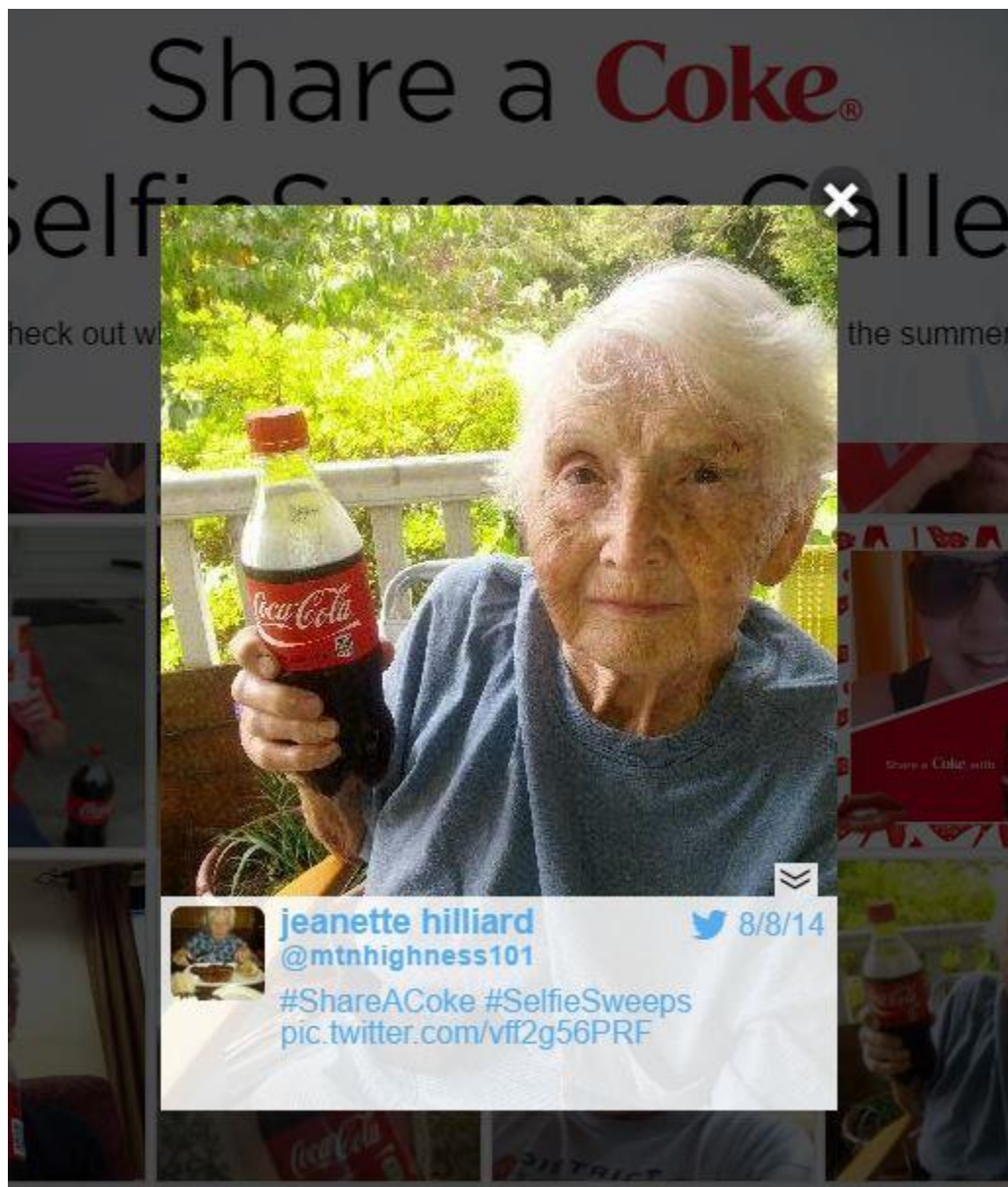


Figure D. A selfie of an old woman in her yard holding a bottle of Coca Cola product.

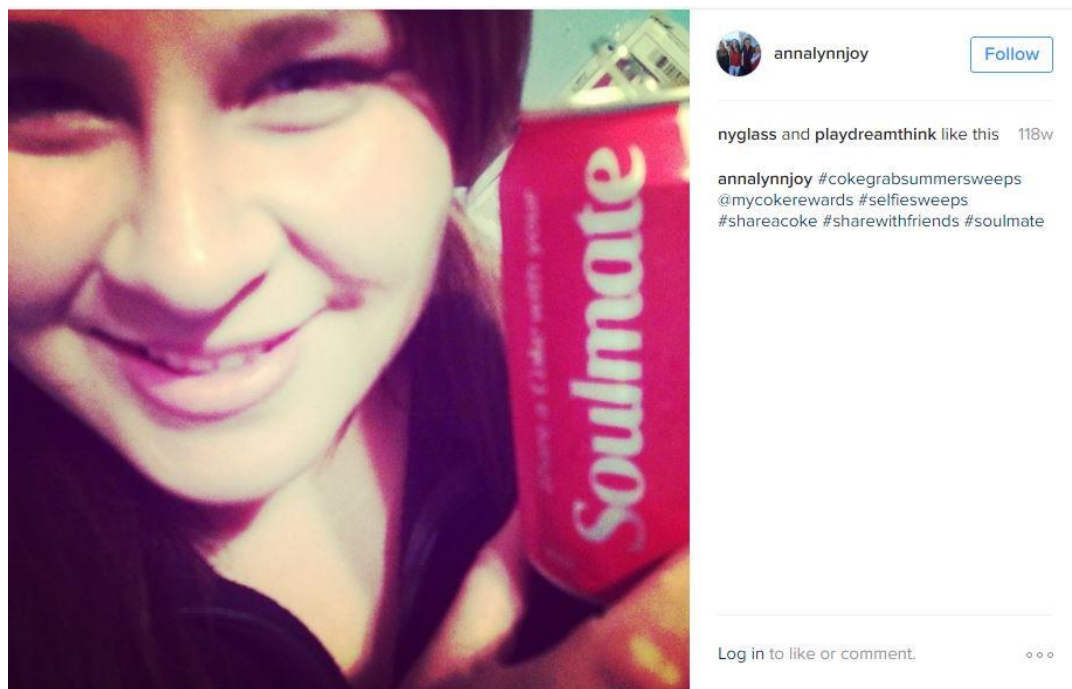


Figure E. Screenshot of female's selfie with the Coca Cola product on social network.

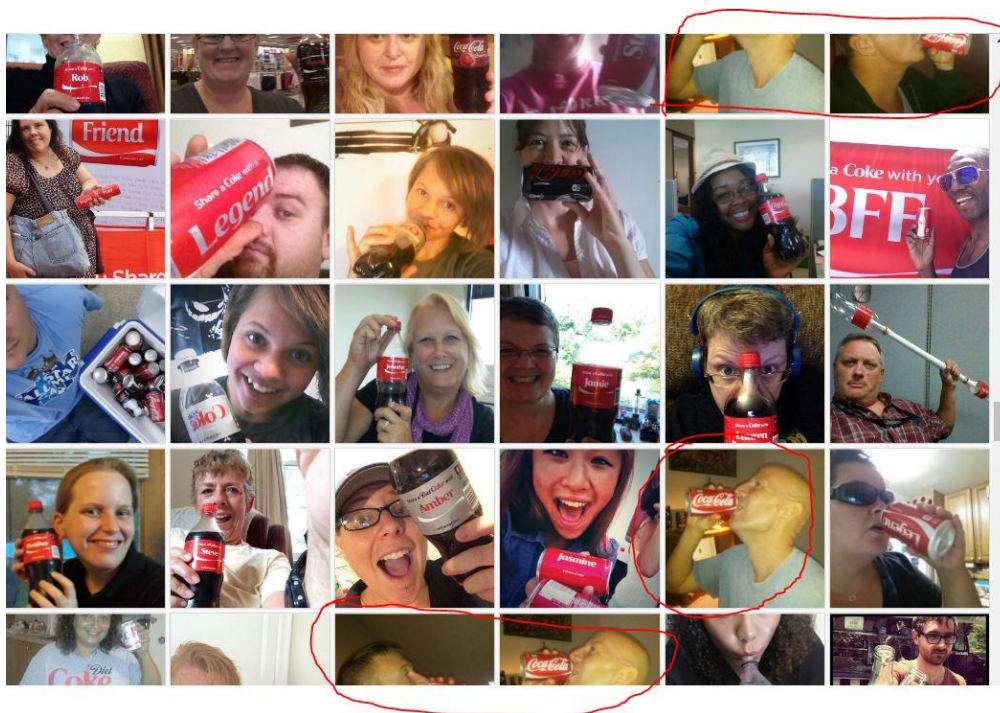


Figure F. Screenshot showing repeated selfie participation/entrees.

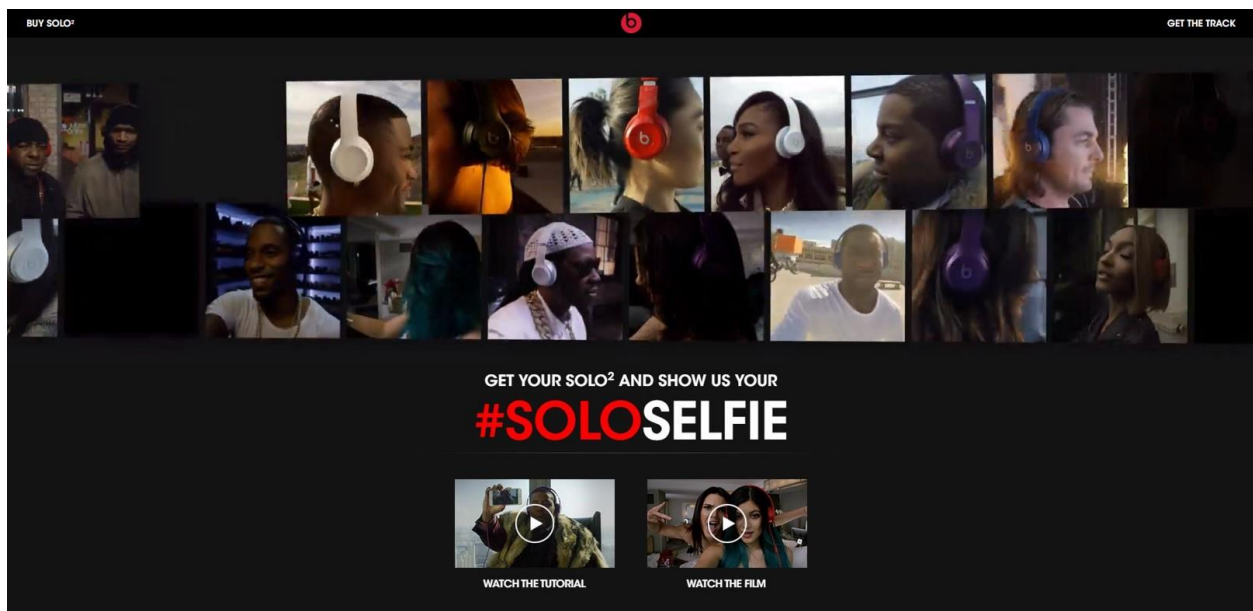


Figure G. Screenshot of the homepage of Solo headphone selfie webpage.



Figure H. Screenshot of one of the participants on Beats selfie website.

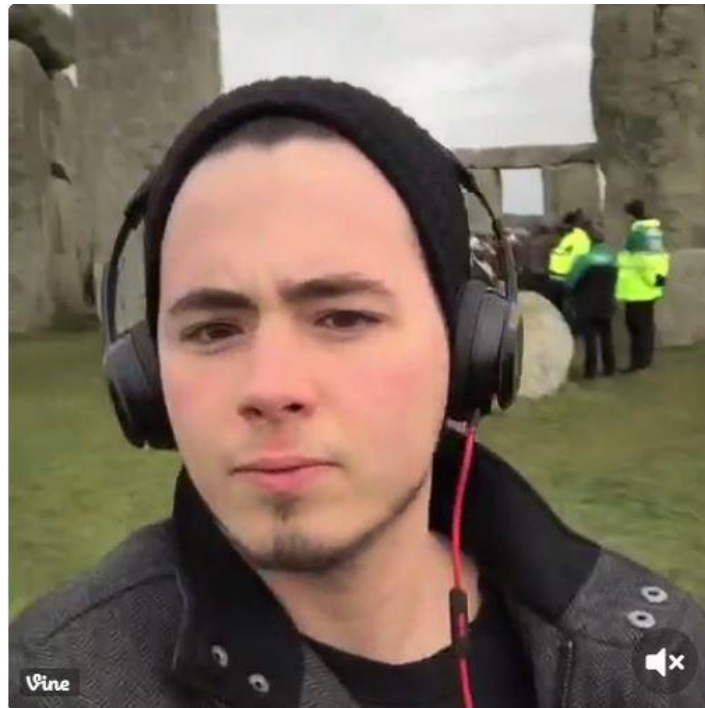


Figure I. Screenshot of a participant showing himself interacting with the product.

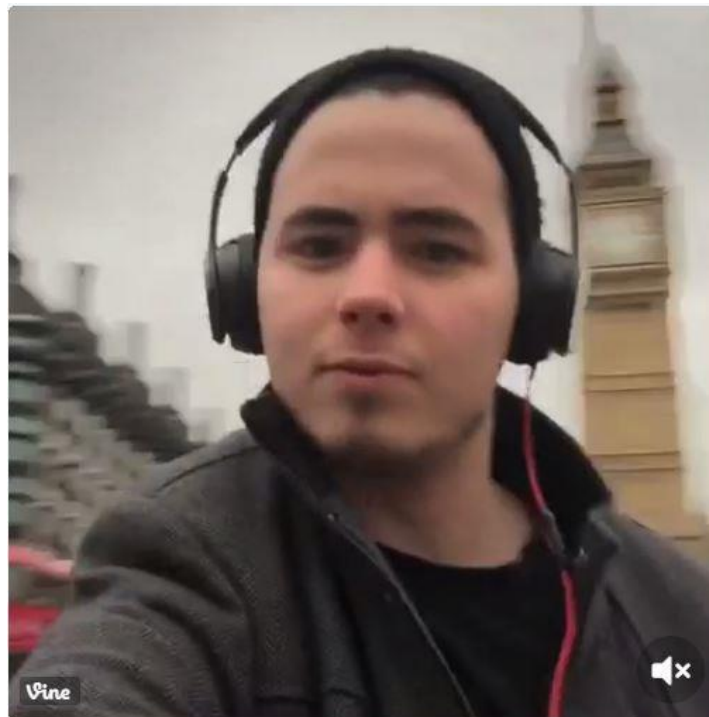


Figure J. Screenshot of a participant showing himself elsewhere with the product.

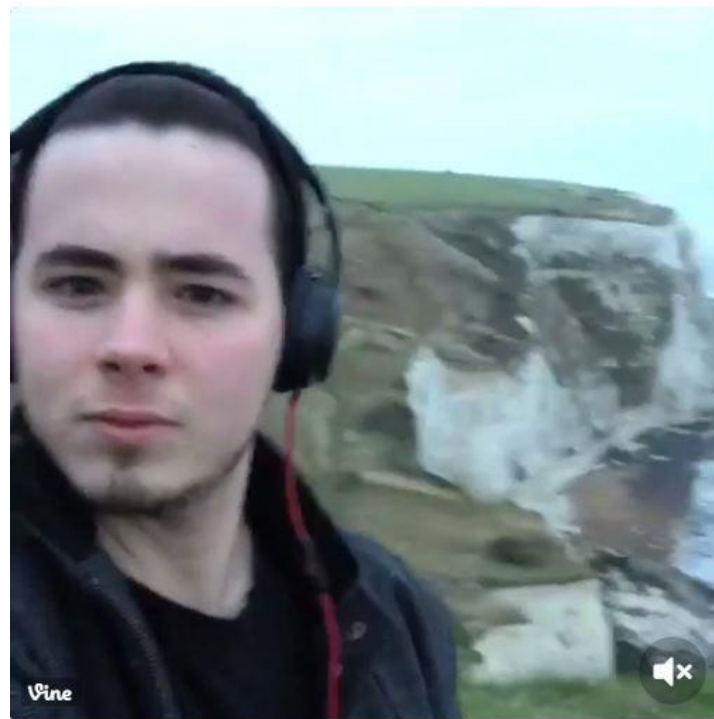


Figure K. Another screenshot of a participant showing himself elsewhere

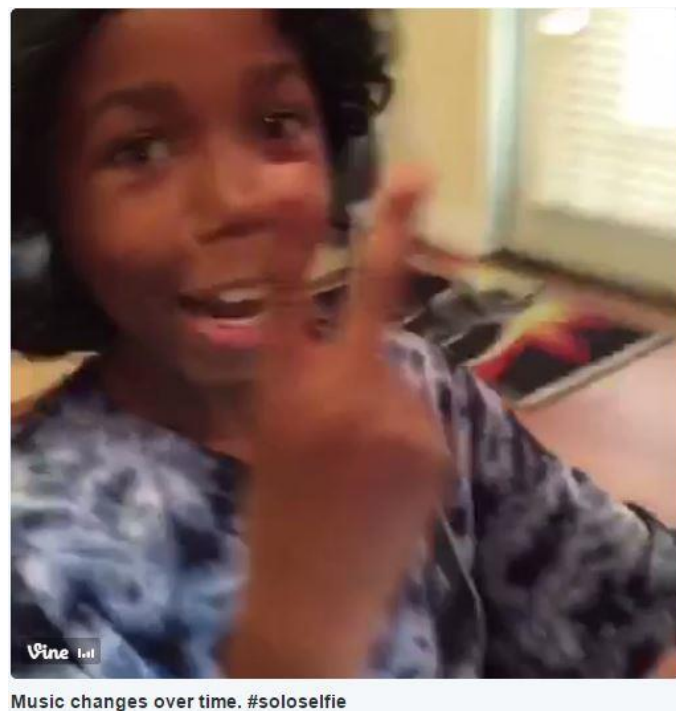


Figure L. Screenshot of a kid having fun wearing the headphone.

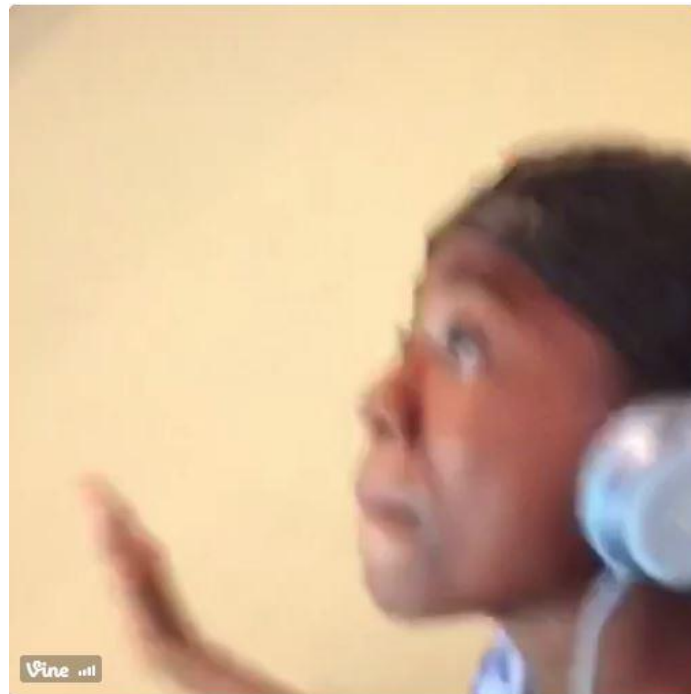


Figure M. Another screenshot of a boy having fun wearing the headphone.



Figure N. Screenshot of the father having fun with the headphone.

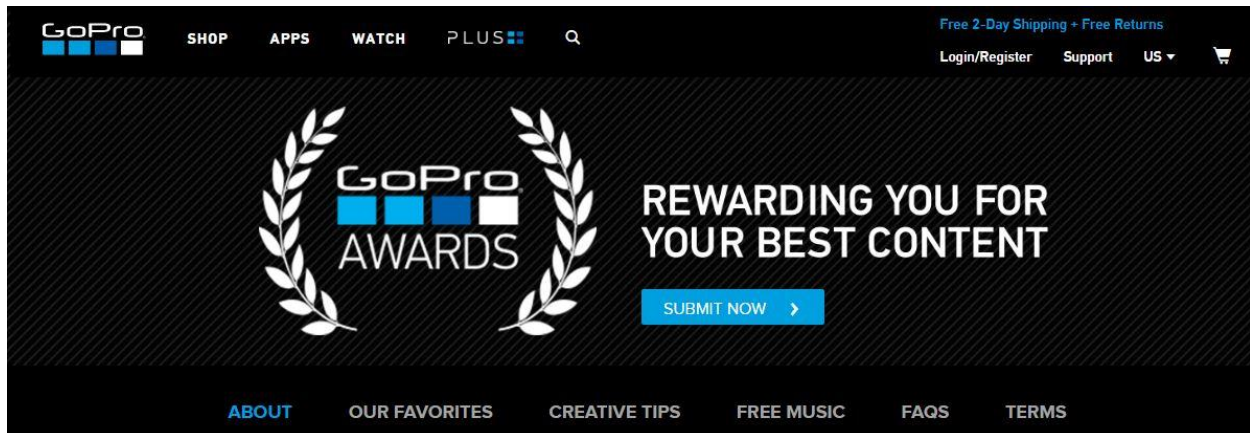


Figure O. Screenshot of the GoPro selfie submission website.



Figure P. Screenshot of a GoPro user's upload of herself holding the product.



Figure Q. Screenshot of a video clip on Youtube recorded by GoPro camera.

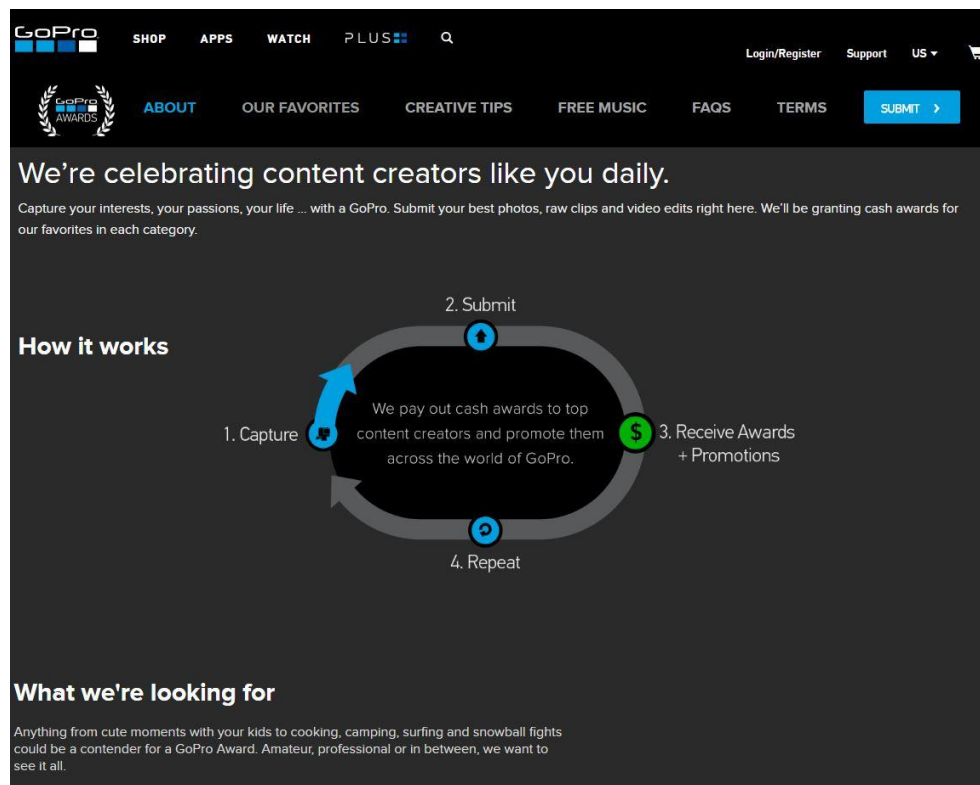


Figure R. Screenshot of the GoPro's cycle of operation.

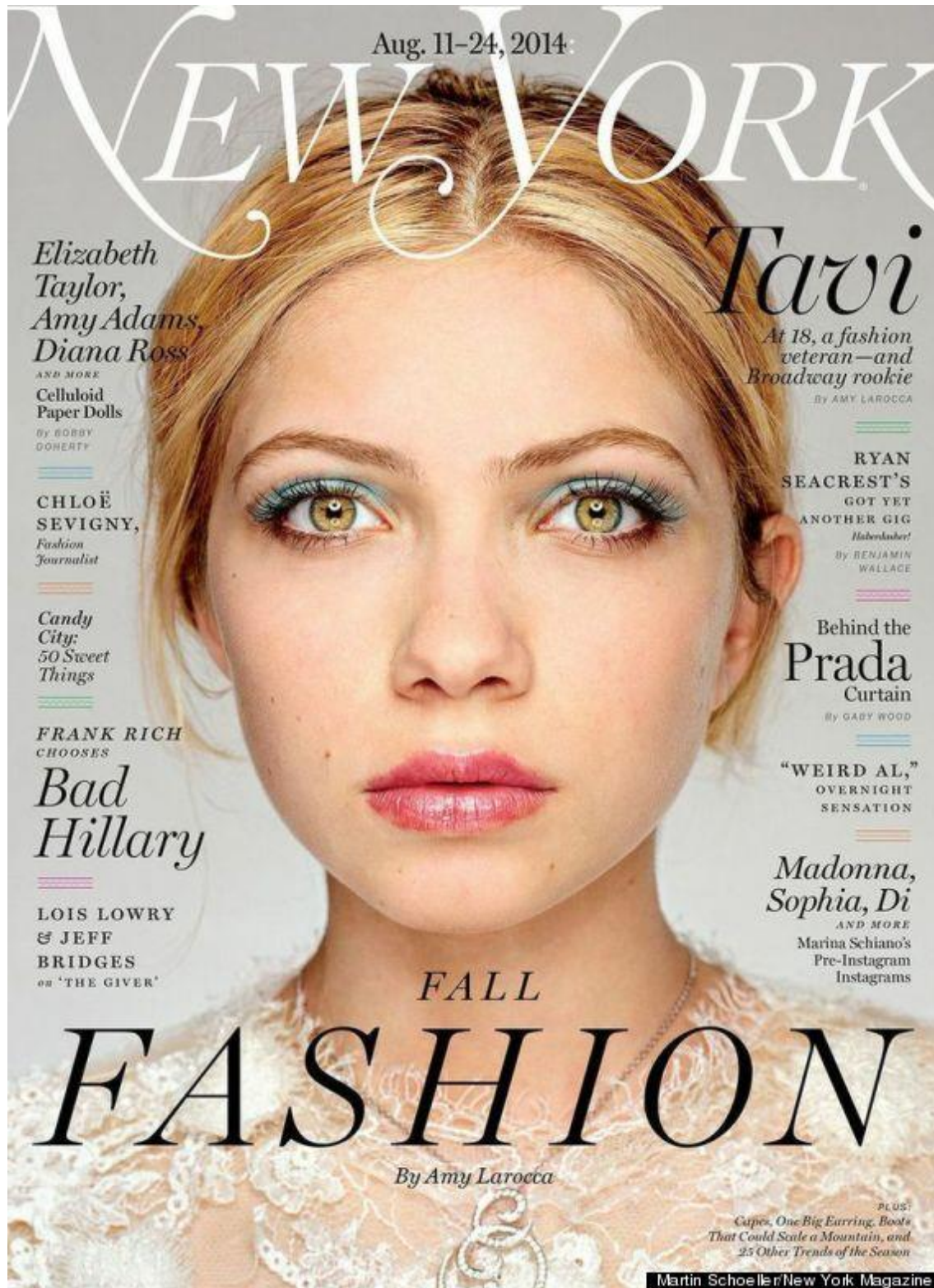


Figure S. Front page of the *Fashion* magazine featuring Tavi Gevinson.



Figure T. Screenshot of the Chinese online celebrity Mofan Zhang with products being promoted.